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ORGANIZATION OF THE ISRAELI ARMY RESERVE
FORCES AND THEIR MOBILIZATION/EMPLOYMENT
IN THE SIX DAY WAR,

by

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this essay is to review the reserve system as it exists in the Israeli Army to see if its effectiveness is transferable to the Reserve Forces of the United States. The essay reviews the development of the Israeli Army and notes its long standing dependence on reserve or citizen soldiers. It discusses the 1967 mobilization, the Israeli Defense Law, and the posture of the Israeli reserve forces. The essay concludes that the effectiveness of the Israeli reserves is due to the willingness of the citizen soldier to sacrifice his time for service to the nation in the face of a constant life or death threat.

THE SIX DAY WAR

In June 1967, Israel was faced by imminent attack by surrounding Arab nations whose populations exceeded her own by thirty-three to one, and whose armed forces, even though divided and uneven in quality, were at least twice as large¹ as the Israeli Army. Never the less, Israel struck out in all directions and inflicted a humiliating and crushing defeat upon its Arab neighbors. In six days time, Israel moved from control of 8,000 square miles of territory to control of 34,000.² During the fighting, the Arabs lost 35,000 killed in action and probably three times that number wounded.³ Israel's losses were 679 killed in action and 2,563 wounded. After the hostilities were ended, Israel exchanged 6,000 Egyptian prisoners of war for sixteen Israeli captives.⁴ Although Israel's losses are minute when compared to those of their enemies, they were huge in proportion to the size of their nation. To put them into perspective you must realize that the population of the United States would have to bear the loss of 51,604 killed in action and 194,788 wounded to suffer the same propor-

¹Shimon Peres, David's Sling(1970),p.12.

²W. Cleon Skousen, Fantastic Victory(1967),p.142.

³Ibid.,p.143.

⁴Ibid.,p.144. /

tion of casualties.⁵ How did the little nation of Israel gather the strength to smash its tormentors? To find out we have to study its army, paying greatest attention to the development, organization and employment of its reserve forces.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

On 27 June 1948,⁶ Zahal Zug Ha-Haganah Le Israel, the Israel Defense Force (I.D.F.), was created to be the swift sword of the new nation of Israel. This force did not arrive full-blown upon the scene, but was built on unofficial forces already in being.

Probably the first organized force active in the Zionist settlements of Palestine was the Hashomer or Watchmen organized in 1909.⁷ These irregular groups served as police and organized settlements for self-protection from raiding bands of robbers.

The first forces organized with military rank and discipline appeared during World War I when the British, fighting the Turks in the near east, sought Jewish Pal-

⁵Ibid.

⁶Yigal Allon, The Making of Israel's Army(1971),p.3.

⁷Amos Perlmutter, Military and Politics in Israel(1969),p.4.

estinian support and organized units such as the Zion Mule Corps and the two Gdudim (legions).⁸ The war's end saw the dissolution of these organizations, but the young men who had served in them provided military know-how for the Zionist military forces which developed during and between the periods of Arab riots against the Jews (1921, 1929 and 1936-39).⁹

Although Palestine was under British Mandate following World War I, Arab hostility to Zionist settlement and expansion was such that defense of isolated communities required self-help action by the members of the communities. The Irgun Ha-Haganah, the Jewish Defense Organization, was established on 25 June 1921¹⁰ and it set out to organize a Palestine-wide Jewish defense system. Its efforts were so successful that by 1937 the Haganah was operating as a Zionist General Staff.

It was a British officer, Captain Orde Wingate, who organised and trained the "Special Night Squads" in the late 1930s. These squads specialized in ambush-

⁸Ibid., pp. 6-7.

⁹Allon, p. 6.

¹⁰Perlmutter, p. 13.

ing Arab raiders before they could reach target settlements.¹¹

With the coming of World War II, British Mandate recruiting offices were opened to Jewish settlers and 30,000 of them volunteered to fight against the Axis Powers as members of Jewish units organized in the British Army.¹²

World War II was also the period in which the Pal-
mach (Commando) was established. The Palmach was the
first Zionist regular army military organization. In the
early Palmach there was a constant forced turnover of
personnel ¹³ in order to spread military training and
experience over as much of the Jewish population as
possible. Every private was released after two years
service and placed in reserve. Every section leader was
moved to the reserve after three years and every junior
officer after four years. Serving time for company
commanders and senior officers was decided by the Pal-

¹¹ Ibid., p. 33.

¹² Ibid., p. 34.

¹³ Allon, p. 23.

mach leaders. The reservists were called up for a few weeks each year for exercises and they were also required to participate in occasional operations. The Palmach experience helped to establish the reserve system of the I.D.F. as it exists today.

By 1946, the Haganah had 45,000 members. The Palmach had 2,000 full-time members, 7,000 served part-time in Haganah field units and 10,000 were organized in brigades composed of high school or college age youth. The balance of the Haganah forces were available in reserve.¹⁴ By this time, Haganah was acting against both Arabs and British Mandate forces which were trying to restrain Zionism in order to maintain their standing with the Arabs. As a result of the conflict with the Mandate forces, radical organizations such as the Irgun Zvai Leumi (National Military Organization) and the so-called "Stern Gang" appeared on the scene and engaged in terrorist activities which resulted in some conflict with the Haganah which did not end until they were eliminated when Israel became independent. This occurred in 1948. The British gave up the Palestine Mandate

¹⁴Perlmutter, p.49.

and as they departed, the nation of Israel was born. The new state had an army in being which consisted of the Palmach (one brigade of four battalions), a number of Haganah battalions and a Home Guard designed for the passive defense of Jewish settlements. The Palmach was rapidly expanded to ten battalions divided into three brigades.¹⁵ The Zahal (Zavah Haganah Le-Israel or Israel Defense Army)¹⁶ was created from the Haganah and the strength of the army rapidly reached seven regular (Haganah) brigades, three Palmach brigades and one armored brigade.¹⁷ By 1949, after a series of successful Israeli operations, the Arabs agreed to a cease-fire.

The failure of the Israelis to gain a peace after the cease-fire firmed up a national military policy that General Allon stated as follows: "Military service was universally regarded not as an end in itself, but as an inescapable condition of survival."¹⁸ To insure national survival, the Israelis maintained as small a standing army as possible. That army was to consist of

¹⁵Allon, pp. 36-37.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 53.

conscripts and a permanent command cadre plus the required experts and skilled technicians needed to maintain an expandable force. The rest of the army was to exist in reserve, both as units and individuals. Allon describes the bulk of the army as consisting of "regular soldiers who happen to be on leave eleven months a year."¹⁹ All citizens, both men and women, had an obligation to perform military service. Salaries, allowances and expenses were kept low but the best weapons that could be acquired were used. Transport, engineer, medical and communications units were based on appropriate civilian organizations.²⁰

The effective Israeli performance in the Sinai Campaign of October 1956 indicates that the builders of the army were on the right track. Apparently the Arab nations discounted the Israeli military success in the Sinai as something dependent on the spectacular Franco-British attack on the Suez Canal which occurred

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

at the same time. At any rate, it was the bellicosity of the Arabs which brought on the Six Day War of 1967.

THE RESERVIST IN THE SIX DAY WAR

Although statistics vary, The Los Angeles Times used the following figures to compare the Arab and Israeli forces in June 1967:²¹

	<u>Israel</u>	<u>Arab</u>
Total Force	300,000	643,000
Army	291,000	565,000
Regular	71,000	
Reserve	220,000	
Navy	8,000	15,300
Air Force	8-14,000	40-45,000

The Israel regular army consisted of four brigades (one airborne) and an armored command of divisional size. The reserve consisted of twenty-four brigades, eight of which were armored.²² At the time that the war began, Israel was spending ten percent of its four billion dollar gross national product on defense preparations.²³ Israel was ready to rapidly place one out of

²¹Robert J. Donovan, Israel's Fight for Survival (1967), p. 52.

²²Ibid., pp. 54-55.

²³Skousen, p. 21.

every ten of its citizens in uniform upon mobilization. This is equivalent to the United States putting 20,000,000 persons in its armed forces.²⁴ In the face of a rapidly deteriorating situation, Israel authorized the I.D.F. to take adequate steps on 18 May 1967. These steps consisted of readying the regular army and starting a time-phased mobilization of the reserves. This action soon caused young men, vehicles, boats, planes and heavy equipment to almost disappear from the cities and towns of Israel.

Israel uses two mobilization systems. One is public, consisting of notices in newspapers, on bulletin boards and by announcement on radio, TV, in theaters and by loudspeakers. This method is flawed in that it is self-revealing. The alternative method is clandestine or quiet and consists of individual notification by mail, telephone or messenger.²⁵ During the days subsequent to 18 May 1967, both methods were used. Movie screens and radios announced: "Open Window", "Electric Boiler", "Men at Work", "Wedding March".²⁶ Doctor

²⁴Ibid., p. 50.
²⁵Donovan, p. 56.
²⁶Skousen, p. 53.

Amnon Rubinstein, commander of a reserve anti-aircraft unit, arrived home after a visit to the theater on Friday night, 20 May 1967. Posted on his door was a mobilization notice. In addition, he found another copy slipped under the door. The notices directed him to report to his mobilization assembly point with all personal equipment at 0500 hours, Saturday, 21 May.²⁷

Whether reservists were notified by public alert or quiet alert, response was rapid and nearly total. In fact, many units went to war at greater than full strength when former members who had been retired to the Home Guard refused to abide by their changed status and reported to, and went to war with, their old units.²⁸ Throughout the mobilization period, telephones at headquarters and liaison offices rang continuously as reservists tried to find out why they had not yet been called. Men persisted in showing up, fully equipped, at mobilization assembly points prior to the issuance of unit mobilization orders.²⁹

When the reservists reported to their assembly

²⁷Ruth Bondy, Chad Zmora and Raphael Bashan, Mission Survival (1968), p. 84.

²⁸Jac Weller, "Soldiers for a Lifetime", The National Guardsman (December 1972), p. 5.

²⁹Bondy, Zmora, Bashan, p. 22.

points, arms and equipment were rapidly issued and civilian clothing was packed away. Prepacked bundles of clothing and equipment were handed out by supply personnel without regard to individual sizes. Immediately a rapid barter-exchange process developed between individuals until each man acquired sizes that were generally appropriate.³⁰

Dr. Rubinstein was able to report to his higher headquarters that by 0510 hours, 92 out of the assigned 95 members of his command had reported. Of the three that were not present, two were abroad and one was ill. The sick member joined his unit at its front line station three days later.³¹ Dr. Rubinstein prepared an attendance register and forwarded it to headquarters immediately. This administrative task was required so that families of his unit members could start drawing pay from the central fund set up to compensate reservists while on active duty. By 0600 hours his unit had loaded-up in a civilian bus, a guided tour coach and a small van, all of which had arrived in accordance with pre-arranged mobilization plans, and they

³⁰ Ibid., p. 24.

³¹ Bondy, Zmora, Bashan, p. 85.

were moving south into the Negev.³²

Orthodox Jews who were forced to drive or travel in motor vehicles on the Sabbath were assured by Chief Rabbi, Brigadier General Shlomo Goren, that such travel was authorized by scripture, provided that no other acts that were not essential to national security were performed.³³

As Dr. Rubinstein's small convey moved south, along with many others, Home Guard personnel and other reservists were establishing comfort stations, field showers and mobile canteens at authorized stop points along all motor routes to the forward positions. By noon the convoy arrived at the depot where its heavy equipment was stored. It took Dr. Rubenstein's men only a few minutes to draw the equipment. It was just where the Doctor had inventoried it only two months previously on one of the periodic depot visits that commanders and supply personnel are required to make at regular intervals. After two days at the depot, the unit moved further south to their forward positions and engaged in training right up until the 5 June outbreak of war.³⁴ On

³²Ibid., pp. 86-87.

³³Ibid., p. 97.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 87-88.

that day, these, and other Israeli reservists were engaged in battle without further preparation or training. In order to better understand how this could be done, we must review the Israel Defense Service Law of 1959.

THE DEFENSE SERVICE LAW

The Defense Service Law requires all Israeli citizens or permanent residents to serve in the Israel Defense Force, although, as a matter of practicality, Arabs residing in Israel are not required to serve. The only Arab speaking non-Jews who are conscripted are the Druzes. They reside in non-Moslem communities and for generations have suffered persecution at the hands of their Moslem neighbors. Their conscription is at the insistence of Druze community leaders.³⁵

There are two kinds of service in the I.D.F., regular and reserve. The regular service is composed of the volunteer long service career officers and N.C.O.s, plus the conscripts that make up the bulk of the regular force. Regular service is required of all males who are between 18 and 29 inclusive, and all females between 18 and 26 inclusive. Physicians are liable for service up to age

³⁵Ibid., p.100.

38 in some instances.³⁶

Every resident has to be called to duty within 24 months of his attaining age 18. A new immigrant will be called within 18 months after arrival in the country. Persons deferred at their own request are called within 12 months of the expiration of their deferrment. If, at the convenience of the government, an individual is not called within the periods mentioned above, his liability for regular service is ended and he serves only in the reserve.³⁷

The duration of service, for those found physically fit to serve, is as shown below:³⁸

Age at Call-up	18-26	27-29	30-34	35-38
Men.	* 30 mos	24 mos	-----	-----
Immigrant	-----	18 mos	-----	-----
Men Over 27.	*			
Physicians, Male.	30 mos	24 mos	24 mos	12 mos
Immigrant	-----	18 mos	18 mos	12 mos
Male Physicians				
Over Age 27(Also applies to immigrant female physicians).				
Females.	20 mos	-----	-----	-----
Physicians, Female.	20 mos	-----	-----	-----

* Men are currently required to spend 36 mos on AD³⁹

³⁶DIA Report #6 849 0066 71, Regular Service and Mobilization in the I.D.F.(U)CONFIDENTIAL,(March 1971), Incl 1, p.1.(hereafter referred to as DIA Report)

³⁷Ibid., Incl 1, p.2.

³⁸Ibid., Incl 1, p.4.

³⁹Ibid., p.2. 14

Persons who have completed regular service are required to enroll in the reserve service for a period extending through age 49 for males and age 34 for females. Persons in the reserve service are required to perform monthly service on the basis of one day per month, or two consecutive days in a two month period, or three consecutive days in a three month period. In addition, yearly service is required in accordance with the table shown below:⁴⁰

<u>Males</u>	<u>Age 18-39</u>	<u>Age 40-49</u>
Pvt & LCpl	31 days	14 days
Cpl & above	38 days	21 days
<u>Females</u>	<u>Age 18-34</u>	
Pvt & LCpl	31 days	
Cpl & above	38 days	

A reservist is considered to be a soldier in every respect and he must meet certain obligations, even when not serving on reserve duty. For instance, he must keep his unit informed of any changes in address or in his personal status. In addition he must safeguard all military property which is in his possession.

⁴⁰Ibid., Incl 1, p. 5.

Although reserve service continues to age 50, persons below the rank of lieutenant and who are otherwise not essential to the I.D.F. are allowed to serve with the Home Guard after passing age 45.⁴¹

Exemptions to compulsory service can be gained by pregnancy, motherhood, or religious or moral scruples by women. The Minister of Defense may grant release from active or reserve service to others on the basis of family or national economic need, or other suitable reasons. Permission to travel abroad for persons who have attained military age must be obtained from the Ministry of Defense.⁴²

Thus most able-bodied male Israeli citizens serve for a three year period in an active unit learning military skills. For many years afterward they regularly serve from 43 to 50 days per year on duty with a reserve unit. Under the stimulus of the constant threat of annihilation at the hands of its neighbors, Israel's citizens accept tremendous military demands upon their time. The reserve units in the Israeli Army are not composed of persons who have had only minimal active duty training and thus have to

⁴¹Ibid., Incl 1, p.6.

⁴²Ibid., Incl 1, pp.6-7.

be taught to attain readiness, rather, they are well trained soldiers, formed into units in which all are working together to maintain the readiness which they developed while in the regular service.

ISRAELI RESERVE POSTURE

Israeli reserve combat units are organized in brigades, as are the units in active service. As an example, there are now four active armor brigades in the I.D.F. and six reserve armor brigades.⁴³ All of these reserve brigades are available for duty at short notice. They are kept that way with the help of a small full-time cadre of careerists. These active personnel include commanders, clerks and technical specialists who devote full time to maintaining equipment in combat readiness, carry out administrative requirements, plan training and keep up with mobilization requirements.

Where possible, to assist in rapid mobilization, units are organized in a specific geographical area.⁴⁴ But transfers to meet civilian requirements may mean that some personnel reside at a great distance from their units, although the small size of the nation keeps

⁴³Weller, p.6.

⁴⁴M. Rosen and I. Heymont, Review and Analysis of Selected Foreign Reserve Systems, App.D, Israel (1971), p.D-4.

this from being too great a problem.⁴⁵

Tanks of the reserve armor brigades are kept gassed up and ammunition is stowed (probably not fused) in their racks.⁴⁶ During annual training all crews get plenty of live firing and they are able to maneuver extensively in areas of possible employment along the Golan Heights or in the Negev or Sinai Deserts.

Rosen and Heymont state that:

"Before the 1967 war, the first line reserve units generally followed a loosely structured 3-year training cycle. The first year covered training through the platoon level. The second year's training was through the battalion level. In the third year, training was at the brigade level or the unit was given an operational mission along the border."⁴⁷

Israeli mobilization plans are exercised regularly so that units can be employed in combat in as little as 24 to 48 hours.⁴⁸ Weller reports a deputy brigade

⁴⁵Weller, p.7.

⁴⁶Ibid., p.6.

⁴⁷M. Rosen and I. Heymont, p.D-4.

⁴⁸Ibid., p.D-5.

commander indicated that his armor brigade was fully deployable in 96 hours, but Weller's own opinion was that the unit was actually able to function at 90% effectiveness in about half a day.⁴⁹

Israeli reserve forces do not maintain urban armories or training centers. Rather, their equipment is kept in depots which are unmarked and sited away from prying eyes. They are guarded around the clock by men, dogs and electronic surveillance devices. Security is the responsibility of the full time cadre, reservists on monthly service, and Home Guardsmen.⁵⁰

The constant flow of men recently released from active service into the reserve units balances the loss of aging veteran fighters. The new men keep the unit current on latest equipment, doctrine and techniques while the older men pass on combat know-how to the youngsters. Field grade officers and senior N.C.O.s, who remain in reserve units longer than most others, are likely to fill higher level executive positions in civilian life. Weller feels that the correlation between civilian and reserve success is greater in the

⁴⁹Weller, p.6.
⁵⁰Ibid.

I.D.F. than in any other army that he has observed.⁵¹

CONCLUSIONS

The reserve forces of the I.D.F. are composed of men who are fully trained soldiers willing to devote extended periods of time to the practice of their martial skills. All land frontiers of their nation are enemy frontiers and they have never been at peace with any of their neighbors. Combat exercises are regularly practiced in areas of possible unit employment. A life or death situation requires the Israeli reservist to be constantly ready for commitment to battle in a matter of hours. This situation has created a reserve force that is unique and it probably could not be duplicated in the United States without the existence of a similar threat.



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⁵¹Weller, p.5.

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